

Zero Tolerance Roundtable Opening Statement
Chairman Tom Davis
August 30, 2006, 11:00 a.m.

Good morning and welcome to the third and final formal meeting of the Zero Tolerance Roundtable. A lot has happened since our last meeting and I'm sure that all of you have been working hard on your various projects to increase awareness of steroid abuse.

First of all, I would like to thank everyone here for participating in this effort. It has been a fruitful endeavor as you can see from the recommendations. I am sorry to report that we learned late yesterday that Curt Schilling will not be available today as he's going for his 3,000th strikeout in Oakland this afternoon. His participation has been essential to this forum, and I will be sure to update him on what transpires in today's meeting.

The purpose of this meeting is to put forward our recommendations for improving the fight against youth steroid use. We came here a little over one year ago from varied backgrounds but with a common goal in mind. The mission, as laid out in our first meeting, was to gather information, foster discussion, and provide recommendations on how to address the growing problem of steroid abuse by young athletes. I believe that when you read the recommendations, you will see that we have met that mission. All of the participants were willing to take the time to sit down and talk about how we can make this campaign against steroid use more effective. These recommendations reflect the time and effort put into the process.

The societal problem of steroid abuse is hard to ignore, considering the almost daily stories on athletes accused of, or testing positive for, steroids. Dr. Wadler's recent report linking several former Carolina Panthers players to steroids and human growth hormone is disconcerting. Cyclist Greg Landis and U.S. sprinters Justin Gatlin, LaTasha Jenkins, and Marion Jones are some other names that come to mind in recent headlines. The good news is that these people are getting caught for their illicit drug use. I'd like to think that the increased Congressional focus on this dangerous practice has had an effect on increasing awareness among athletes and in the press. The bad news, however, is that athletes are still using steroids despite fair warning of the penalties they could face if caught. One might wonder whether these penalties are enough of a deterrent. That discussion is for another day. Right now, we should be focused on how we can prevent steroids from becoming a larger problem for future generations. We should continue to focus our efforts on educating children on the dangers of steroids in hopes that they will not succumb to the pressure to enhance their athletic performance through the behavior some of their predecessors succumbed to.

A year and a half ago, my committee gathered to shine a light on Major League Baseball, because we believed sunshine was the best disinfectant. We then formed Zero Tolerance because experience is the best teacher.

The recommendations before you represent a consensus compilation of the efforts and experience of roundtable members. They range from what has been done to address the dangers of steroid use to what needs to be done to continue this effort. I think we would all agree that while putting words on paper is an important first step, it is not the end of the exercise. We must all work together to ensure that these actions are carried out and that our efforts do not end here.

The recommendations provided by our committees on testing and education will hopefully lead to strong community involvement and commitment. While I am pleased with the set of recommendations received from the Subcommittee on Enforcement, I am somewhat disappointed by the lack of player participation. I anticipated, and the players associations and leagues were encouraged to submit, recommendations that included a set number of players who would speak to student athletes on the dangers of using performance-enhancing drugs. I find it hard to believe that the leagues and players associations can not identify professional athletes who would be willing to take time out of their schedules to discuss such an important topic with their young fans. Nevertheless, the leagues' and associations' participation in this roundtable has been crucial, and I hope that they will take note of my consternation with their lack of player involvement at the local level.

This roundtable has provided the unique opportunity for a group of individuals from various backgrounds to sit down and discuss the problem of steroid abuse. I'd like to believe that we have introduced many of our participants to one another; people who would otherwise never have worked together. I hope that, through the relationships we have fostered, we can go forward as a united front. It is imperative that everyone do their part to ensure that our children do not follow the same path as several of the most notorious athletes in U.S. sports history have taken by using steroids. Professional athletes should set an example for the American teenagers and young athletes who admire and emulate them, rather than sending a message that steroid use is acceptable or, even worse, advisable. And we, as citizens and representatives from all levels of athletics, should reinforce the message that steroid use is dangerous and can have detrimental long-term health consequences. These recommendations are a step in the right direction.